CLAIMS:

1. An in vitro diagnostic method for detecting the presence or absence of antibodies to proteins of the lymphadenopathy retrovirus (LAV), the etiological agent of LAS or AIDS, which method comprises:

contacting a biological sample capable of containing LAV antibodies of a patient to be diagnosed for the presence or absence of such antibodies with a composition containing a p18 protein of a lysate of the lymphadenopathy retrovirus (LAV);

detecting the immunological formation of a complex of LAV antibodies in the biological sample and of the composition containing the LAV p18 protein as a positive diagnosis that the patient does have LAV antibodies or the absence of the complex as a diagnosis that the patient does not have LAV antibodies, the lymphadenopathy virus being immunologically distinct from the T leukemia viruses HTLV, including the virus HTLV I.

2. The in vitro diagnostic method of claim 1 wherein the composition containing a p18 protein also contains a p25 protein.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the composition containing the p18 and p25 proteins is free of the p19 protein which is immunologically related to the p19 protein of the HTLV viruses.

4. The method of claim 2 wherein the p25 protein is immunologically distinct from the p24 protein of T leukemia HTLV viruses.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein the composition containing the p25 protein of T leukemia virus LAV is free of p19 protein which is immunologically related to the p19 protein of the HTLV viruses.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein the detection of the immunological reaction, or absence thereof, is by means of radionuclide, fluorescent or enzyme labelling.

7. An in vitro diagnostic method for detecting the presence or absence of AIDS or LAS infection by lymphadenopathy retrovirus (LAV), which method comprises:

contacting a biological fluid of a patient to be diagnosed for LAS or AIDS with a composition containing a p18 protein of a lysate of the lymphadenopathy retrovirus (LAV);

detecting the immunological reaction due to the formation of a complex of LAV antibodies in the biological fluid and the composition containing the LAV p18 protein as a positive diagnosis of the patient's infection with AIDS or LAS, or the absence of said complex as a diagnosis that the patient does not have AIDS or LAS, the lymphadenopathy virus being immunologically distinct from the T leukemia HTLV viruses, including the virus HTLV I.

8. The in vitro diagnostic method of claim 7 wherein the composition containing the p18 protein also contains a p25 protein.

9. A diagnostic kit for diagnosis of LAV antibodies, in a biological fluid of a patient to be diagnosed, the antibodies being immunologically distinct from antibodies against T leukemia HTLV viruses, which kit comprises a composition containing the p18 protein of a lysate of the lymphadenopathy retrovirus (LAV), and means for detecting the formation of a complex in the biological fluid.

10. The diagnostic kit of claim 9 wherein the composition containing the p18 protein also contains a p25 protein.

11. The diagnostic kit of claim 10 wherein the composition containing the p18 and p25 proteins is free of the p19 protein which is immunologically related to the p19 protein of the HTLV viruses.

12. The kit of claim 9 wherein said means for detecting comprises human anti-immunoglobin or protein A.

13. The kit of claim 12 wherein said means for detecting comprises an extract of a T lymphocyte of a patient which does not have AIDS or LAS.

14. The kit of claim 9 wherein the p25 protein is labelled, whereby the complex which is formed is a labelled complex.